

WERE THE SALEM WITCHES GUILTLSS?

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE ESSEX INSTITUTE,

FEBRUARY 29, 1892.

BY BARRETT WENDELL

Assistant Professor of English at Harvard College.

[From the HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS OF THE ESSEX INSTITUTE, VOL. XXIX, 1892.]

SALEM, MASS.

1892.

PRINTED BY
THE SALEM PRESS PUBLISHING AND PRINTING CO.
The Salem Press.
1892.

WERE THE SALEM WITCHES GUILTLSS?

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE ESSEX INSTITUTE, FEBRUARY 29, 1892.

BY BARRETT WENDELL

Assistant Professor of English at Harvard College.

WITHIN the past few years, I have happened, at the suggestion of friends interested in psychic research, to observe three different phases of occult phenomena. The first is materialization, a process by which professional mediums pretend to call up the visible and tangible bodies of the dead. The second is trance-mediumship: the medium, in this case also professional, pretends to be controlled by some departed spirit who uses the tongue of the medium, rather unskillfully, as a means of communication with living beings. The third is automatic writing: in this, acting as a medium myself, I have held a pencil and allowed my hand to run unwatched and uncontrolled by any conscious act of will. I have thus written a great many distinct words, and a few articulate sentences.

Remote as this statement may appear from a confession of capital crime, and far from conclusive as my limited observation and experiment must be, I found that when, in studying the life of Cotton Mather, I was compelled to examine the history of Salem witchcraft, my own occult experiences had induced in me a state of mind that led to some speculative conclusions widely different from those commonly accepted. These I shall venture to state, wholly aware that I have neither the scientific nor the historical learning necessary to give them even a semblance of authority, but hoping that they may perhaps prove suggestive of a line of study which, in more competent hands than mine, might lead to interesting results; for I am disposed to believe not only that in 1692 there was existent in New England, under the name of witchcraft, a state of things quite as dangerous as any epidemic of crime, but also that there is perhaps reason to surmise that not all the victims of the witch trials were innocent.

To explain what I mean, I may, best, perhaps, begin by briefly recounting my own observations and experiments, and then turn to some of the evidence in the witch trials. By comparing this with my experience and with a few facts admitted nowadays—such as the phenomena of hypnotism—I may indicate why I am disposed so heartily to dissent from that rationalistic view of the tragedy of two centuries ago, which has been so admirably and honestly set forth by standard historians.

My own observations of modern occultism were made in the order in which I have named them. I saw the materialized spirits first; later I visited a trance-medium; and not till some time later did I try my hand at automatic writing.

Materialization impressed me as indubitable fraud from beginning to end. You went into a room which was

subsequently so darkened that you could not discern the hands of your watch. In this dim light, a small company, mostly ardent believers, were wrought up into such emotional excitement as could be awakened by hymn tunes played on a common parlor organ, and presently uncanny shapes began to flit about. Sometimes these emerged from a cabinet in which the medium had professed to go into the trance state, sometimes they apparently rose through the floor; at least once,—to all appearances—they took shape on top of an ordinary three-legged table. These figures would talk with you, would shake hands with you, would sometimes be unpleasantly affectionate in demeanor, and would often end by "dematerializing"—that is, by suddenly flopping down into nothing, much as figures in the pantomime disappear through trap-doors. You could not see how the trick was done, but the trick was essentially like what any number of travelling magicians perform. Before long, however, you remarked that the habitual frequenters of these unedifying exercises seemed fervently to believe in them. I remember once finding at my side an elderly man who passionately embraced a male spirit that appeared, and returning to his seat whispered to me in agitated tones that it was his son, who had lately killed himself. The son had been a friend of mine; and when I told the father so, he begged the medium to recall him, that I might speak to him myself and be convinced. But the medium professed inability to recall that particular spirit at the moment, so I was forced to remain sceptical of everything but the fervent belief of the heart-broken father. Next you remarked that, knaves and charlatans as the mediums seemed, they seemed knaves and charlatans of a specific kind. There was no doubt in your mind that they lied to you and tricked you, but I for one could never feel satisfied as to how thoroughly they were aware of the

exact extent of their falsehood,—as to whether beneath all this nonsense and rascality there were not lurking some mysterious subjective experience that had to them a semblance of fact. Finally, you felt a growing sense of debasement in such surroundings. The uncanny insincerity of the mediums, the crass superstition of the believers who formed the circle, the meaningless words and conduct of the materialized spirits—never indecent, but always petty, trivial, low—led me by and by heartily to agree with a friend who declared that while he did not for a moment believe these were spirits at all, he had no shadow of doubt that if they were spirits they were devils.

The chief trance-medium I visited was a woman of high respectability, and of great apparent sincerity of character. In her normal condition she professed complete ignorance of what occurred when she was in the trance state. Into this state she could throw herself at will. Once in this state she assumed a voice and manner totally unlike her own, and professing to be controlled by a spirit, she gave you any number of messages from departed friends, whom she sometimes described and sometimes named. In a sitting with her of some two hours I remarked that, in a vague kind of way, she seemed to follow my line of thought. For example, she made a queer noise that reminded me of the death agony of a friend some time before. This recalled him and the circumstances of his death to my mind. By and by, she named him, and described him with some approach to verisimilitude. The correspondence between what I knew and what she told me was never exact enough to convince me of anything remarkable, but it seemed close enough to warrant me, if I had believed in mind reading, in classing her conduct as mind reading; once for all. When the time came for her to emerge from this trance, she had a startling fit. Amid the contortions which ac-

accompanied what she asserted to be the departure of the spirit which had controlled her, she fell on her knees with a cry of terror, and clutching me begged me not to let *it* take her away; and she looked with every appearance of agonized alarm, at an empty corner of the room from which she shrank away; you would have said she saw the devil himself waiting for her. In a very short time she resumed her natural condition, at first rather dazed, and declared that she had no idea whatever of anything that had happened since she first went into the trance-state two hours before. The most remarkable thing to me about her was that in her normal condition she was the sort of person whom you instinctively believe to speak the truth. It was perfectly easy to assert that she was a common trickster; but to my mind, at all events, the assertion was by no means convincing. My own impression was strongly that she was an honest person, in a very abnormal state, honestly self-deceived; and in this abnormal display and in this self-deception was a quality of debasement, more subtle, less tangible, than I had found in materialization, but, if you granted the supernatural hypothesis at all, equally diabolical.

A year or two after this I found that if, pencil in hand, I left my hand free to run as it would, and occupied my eyes and thoughts with other matters, my hand would clumsily scrawl first queer tremulous lines, then letters, then words. This experience was in no wise peculiar. The friend who first directed my attention to these experiments had made a considerable collection of automatic writings from various people; and these had in common a trait that mine shared with them. The avowedly unguided hand would make for a while—sometimes day after day—apparently meaningless lines that constantly repeated themselves. In time, these lines would grow more definite.

Finally a word would be written; and by comparing a number of the writings you could trace what looked like a long series of almost impotent experiments, finally resulting in this distinct achievement. The first word my hand thus wrote was "sherry."

That it was going to write "sherry" I had no idea. To this point I had been incredulous that it would actually write anything at all. "Sherry" once written, I began to feel more interest in what it might write next. And then soon followed an experience that determined me to give the matter up. In the first place, I found that experiments in automatic writing left me in an irritable nervous condition for which I can find no better name than demoralized. The whole fibre of character seemed for the moment weakened; will, intelligence, self-control, temper, were alike inferior things after the experiments to what they had been before. In the second place, I found that very soon I could not be quite sure whether I actually let my hand run unguided, or whether I slyly helped it write. And whenever that doubt arose in my mind, there always came with it so strong an impulse to deny its existence, to assert that I had no idea what I was about, that I found myself for the moment a completely untrustworthy witness. In other words, the further I got in my very slight excursion into occult experiment, the further I was from intelligence, veracity and honesty. The definite result of these experiments for me was a conviction that no man's word about automatic writing, at any rate, is worth the breath that utters it. The thing is not all fraud,—there is something very queer about it; but not the least phase of the queerness is that it is constantly, increasingly credulous, tricky and mendacious.

In reflecting on these three experiences, I found them by and by grouping themselves as three stages of what

I may call a specific mental or moral disorder. The first and simplest was the automatic writing, whose ill effects induced me to abandon the whole thing. The second was the mediumistic trance, in which a woman whom I believe honest in her natural character hypnotized herself, and in the hypnotic state became perhaps abnormally perspicacious, and almost certainly a dangerous charlatan. The third was the elaborately dishonest mummery of materialization, where the fraud was so palpable that it seemed almost indubitably deliberate from beginning to end. But comparing this deliberate fraud with the simpler phases of occultism that I had observed, I found myself more and more disposed to believe it a kind of deliberate fraud, in all respects debasing, into which I could easily conceive an originally honest person to be unwittingly led.

All this time my impressions of Salem witchcraft had been derived from two absorbing days that I had passed with Mr. Upham's book some years ago. It had never occurred to me to question his conclusions; nor would it have occurred to me had I not been called on to make a careful study of the life and character of Cotton Mather, whom I found on intimate acquaintance by no means the deliberate villain I had been led to believe him. In making that study, I had occasion to read the original evidence in the witch-trials.¹ And what most impressed me in that evidence was its startling familiarity. The surroundings were in all respects different from anything I had known. In a century and a society far more remote from us in condition than they are in time, certain unhappy people were bringing against others more unhappy still charges that involved their lives. But the controlling spirit, the atmosphere of this grotesque tragedy was something I had known in the flesh. Whoever has frequented materialization

¹Woodward, W. E. *Records of Salem Witchcraft, 1691-2*, copied from the original documents. Roxbury, 1864-65, 2v., 4to. (Woodward's Hist. ser., v. 1, 2).

séances, and who then reads with sympathetic imagination the broken records of the witch trials, can hardly help admitting, I think, that these things are of the same kind. There is fraud in both—horribly tragic fraud then, grotesquely comic fraud now,— but in both the fraud is of the same horrible vaporous kind; and in both there is room for a growing doubt whether there be not in all this more than fraud and worse. If there be, that mysterious thing is subtly evil beyond words; if there be an incarnate spirit of evil, then that mysterious thing is the direct work of that spirit. The nineteenth century has discarded the devil; to the seventeenth century, at least in New England, he was just as real as God. And the sin that transcended all other sin that could be done by the fallen children of Adam was the sin of those who, despairing of Heaven, leagued themselves before their time with Hell.

This is not the moment to analyze in detail the tremendous force of the doctrine of election that lay at the base of the creed which for seventy years dominated New England. But whoever would understand the society from which sprang the witches and the witch-judges of 1692 must never forget the grim creed which, declaring that no man could be saved but by the special grace of God, and that the only test of salvation was ability to exert the will in accordance with His, bred in the devout, and in whoever was affected by their counsels, an habitual introspection, and an habitual straining for mystical intercourse with the spiritual world, to-day almost inconceivable. In a world dominated by a creed at once so despairing and so mystic, it would not have been strange if now and then wretched men, finding in their endless introspection no sign of the divine marks of grace, and stimulated in their mysticism beyond modern conception by the churches that claimed and imposed an authority almost unsurpassed in history, had been tempted to seek, in premature alliance with the

powers of evil, at least some semblance of the freedom that their inexorable God had denied them. It was such an alliance with which the Salem witches were charged. It is just such miserable debasement of humanity as should follow such an alliance that pervades the evidence of the witch-trials, just as to-day it pervades the purlieus of those who give themselves up to occultism in its lower forms.

The question I asked myself, when this view of the matter became clear to me, was whether in this evidence I could find traces of the other stages of occultism to which I have already called your attention. To answer this question to anybody's satisfaction would need longer and more careful study than I have been able to give the documents; but what little study I have had time for has suggested to me, more and more strongly, that prolonged study might yield surprising results. I will try very briefly to analyze the evidence, to show what I mean.

It is not generally remembered, in spite of Mr. Upham's admirable work, that the great bulk of this evidence is what was called spectral. A girl, for example, was bewitched, and testified that the physical torture she was apparently undergoing was caused by the conduct of the apparition of one of the accused—an apparition providentially invisible to whoever was not bewitched. It was the acceptance by the court of this obviously worthless evidence that hanged the witches; it was the throwing out of such evidence that brought the witch trials to a close. It was his momentary faith in such evidence—not in the horrible reality of witchcraft itself—that Samuel Sewall publicly repented in the Old South Church. And in analyzing the records of these old trials, we must put aside, once for all, every particle of this evidence, save as it tells against the witnesses themselves.

In a way, however, this evidence tells against the wit-

nesses themselves rather startlingly. It was often accompanied in full court, by conduct that went far to make judges and attendants believe it. I cite almost at random, a single example of what I mean. In the examination of Rebecca Nurse is this passage:¹

"Why should not you also be guilty for your apparition doth hurt also.

"Would you have me bely myself.

"She held her neck on one side, and accordingly so were the afflicted taken."

A moment later²—"Nurse held her neck on one side and Eliz. Hubbard (one of the sufferers) had her neck set in that posture whereupon another patient Abigail Williams, cried out, set up Goody Nurse's head, the maid's neck will be broke, and when some set up Nurse's head Aaron Wey. observed y^t Betty Hubbards was immediately righted."

This tells nothing whatever against Rebecca Nurse. What it tells against Betty Hubbard would have seemed a few years ago merely that she was a deliberate and unprincipled trickster. To-day, I think, it goes far to suggest a much less simple state of things: namely, that Betty Hubbard was a hypnotic subject, so far gone as to be instantly affected by the slightest suggestion from a person on whom her diseased attention was concentrated. And it is typical of things that occurred throughout the sessions of the witch-courts. I am no expert in hypnotism, but what little I have read and seen of it so exactly corresponds with so much that is in this witch-evidence that I should be gravely surprised if experts who examined the evidence did not find the evidence going far to suggest that almost all the bewitched were probably victims of hypnotic excesses.

¹1: 86-7. ²1: 87.

It is only in recent times, I believe, that careful study of the still mysterious and dangerous phenomena of hypnotism has tended to show that it depends far more on the subject than on the operator, and that a good subject, by careful concentration of attention, can hypnotize himself. That the bewitched sufferers at Salem often hypnotized themselves is highly probable. Here is another extract from the evidence—this time from one of those unaccountable confessions which have so baffled cool critics.¹

"Now Mary Warren fell into a fit, and some of the afflicted cried out that she was going to confess, but Goody Korey and Procter and his wife came in their apparition and struck her down and said she should tell nothing.

"Mary Warren continued a good space in a fit, that she did neither see, nor hear, nor speak.

"Afterwards she started up, and said I will speak and cried out, Oh! I am sorry for it, I am sorry for it, and wringed her hands and fell a little while into a fit again and then came to speak, but immediately her teeth were set, and then she fell into a violent fit and cried out, Oh Lord help me! Oh Good Lord save me!

"And then afterwards cried again, I will tell, I will tell and then fell into a dead fit again"—which continued until "she was ordered to be had out."

A little later she was "called in afterwards in private before magistrates and ministers.

"She said I shall not speak a word; but I will I will speak Satan.—She saith she will kill me. Oh! she says she owes me a spite and will claw me off.

"Avoid Satan, for the name of God Avoid and then fell into fits again; and cried will ye, I will prevent ye in the name of God."—

¹ I: 120.

But in spite of her will, her fits persisted and "her lips were bit so that she could not speak so she was sent away."

Within two days she made an elaborate, and apparently mendacious confession of all sorts of occult absurdity, beginning with the assertion that her master and mistress had forced her into witchcraft, making her sign a book, and that they had made her stick a pin into a puppet, and so on.

Without putting the least credence in this testimony against her employers, I am nevertheless very much struck by the likeness between this poor creature's conduct before the Salem magistrates and ministers, and the conduct of the trance-medium in Boston, who, as she was emerging from her trance, begged me to save her from the horrible creature she thought she saw in the corner. This medium was undoubtedly given to hypnotizing herself. How she had learned to do so I do not know. Is there not reason to guess that Mary Warren may have been given to hypnotizing herself, too; and that very possibly she may have been taught to do so?

In the midst of all this horrible confusion, then, there are glimpses of two of the stages of occultism to which I bore personal testimony. Is there any of the third, such as I dabbled in myself? Of automatic writing, I have found no trace: that experiment I conceive to be a very modern one. But here is what poor Giles Corey testified against his wife.¹—

"Last Satturday in the Evening Sitting by the fire my wife asked me to go to bed. I told her I would go to prayer and when I went to prayer I could not utter my desires w^h any sense, *not open my mouth to speake*,² my wife did perceiv it and came towards me and said she was coming to me. After this in a little space I did according

¹ I: 55-6. ² These italics are mine.

TO MY MEASURE attend the duty . . . My wife hath ben wont to sett up after I went to bed and I have perceived her to kneel down on the harth as if she were at prayer but heard nothing."

A mere question of temper, if you please; but if he had set about to describe an elementary hypnotic experiment, could he have said much otherwise? And is that kneeling figure at the hearth, in the flickering firelight of two centuries ago, quite godly in aspect?

Again¹: "John Blye Senior agett about 57 yeers and William Blye aged about 15 years both of Salem Testifieth and sayth yt being Imployed by Bridgitt Boshop Alies Oliuer of Salem to helpe take doune ye Cellar wall of The Owld house she formerly Lived in wee ye sd Deponents in holes in ye sd owld wall belonging to ye sd Cellar found seuerall popitts made up of Raggs And hoggs Brussells wth headles pins in Them. wth ye points outward and this was about Seaven years Last past."

Children's toys, to a nineteenth century mind. But all through the records of mediæval witchcraft and magic lie just such children's toys which the world believed very fatal engines of death. I spoke of that testimony the other day to a friend who happens to be—what I am far from being—an ardent believer in that prevalent mysticism called Christian Science. To me, I said, the evidence went a good way to show that somebody had actually been trying in Salem to see whether by sticking pins into a doll you could not torture the enemy that the doll represented: the practice certainly had existed in Europe, absurd as it must seem to us. To my surprise, my friend replied that to her it did not seem absurd at all: any believer in Christian Science, she went on, knew that by concentrating your mind on an absent person you could affect that person for good

or for ill ; and that while the actual sticking of pins into dolls could never directly hurt anything but the dolls, it could help a malevolent mind so to concentrate itself on the person a doll represented as to injure him with far less effort than when there was no doll to aid it ;—which view, she added, was the view of Paracelsus.

I mention that case just to remind you how curiously some of the educated minds of our own time are recurring to kinds of mysticism that have so long seemed purely superstitious ; how much more credible witchcraft is than it used to be, now that we see these honest, intelligent mystics all about us.

For only change the impulse of these very people from the pure one it generally is, to the base one that was held to actuate the witches, and you have at your very firesides not a few examples of what witches were. And do not the silenced husband of Martha Corey, and the pin-riddled dolls hidden in Bridget Bishop's cellar wall go at least a little way to suggest that perhaps they had made unholy experiments?

Only a little way, I hasten to add. No one can be better aware than I that such evidence as I have offered here is very slight—at best not more than suggestive. Nor can any one know better than I what I cannot too earnestly repeat, that I have neither the scientific nor the historical learning that would be necessary to make anything I should say more than suggestive to better and wiser students. But this evidence, typical of much more that can be dug out of those bewildering old documents, will show you the sort of thing that has led me both to believe that there was abroad in 1692 an evil quite as dangerous as any still recognized crime, and to wonder whether some of the witches may not after all, in spite of the weakness and falsity of the evidence that hanged them, have deserved their hanging.

It remains for me to show why I believe this evil so

serious and the crime of whoever committed it in the seventeenth century so gross. I cannot do so better than by repeating some words I published a few months ago¹:— If, as modern science tends to show, human beings are the result of a process of evolution from lower forms of life, there must have been in our ancestral history a period when the intelligence of our progenitors was as different from the modern human mind as were their remote aquatic bodies from the human form we know to-day. It seems wholly conceivable, then, that in the remote psychologic past of our race there may have been in our ancestors certain powers of perception which countless centuries of disuse have made so rudimentary that in our normal condition we are not conscious of them. But if such there were, it would not be strange that, in abnormal states, the rudimentary vestiges of these disused powers of perception might sometimes be revived. If this were the case, we might naturally expect two phenomena to accompany such a revival: in the first place, as such powers of perception belong normally to a period in the development of our race when human society and moral law have not yet appeared, we should expect them to be intimately connected with a state of emotion that ignores the moral sense, and so to be accompanied by various forms of misconduct; in the second place, as our chief modern means of communication—articulate language—belongs to a period when human intelligence has assumed its present form, we should expect to find it inadequate for the expression of facts which it never professed to cover, and so we should expect such phenomena as we are considering to be accompanied by an erratic, impotent inaccuracy of statement, which would soon shade into something indistinguishable from

¹ In my *Life of Cotton Mather*, pp. 95-6.

deliberate falsehood. In other words, such phenomena would naturally involve, in whoever abandons himself to them, a mental and moral degeneracy which any one who believes in a personal devil would not hesitate to ascribe to the direct intervention of Satan.

Now what disposes me, scientifically a layman I cannot too earnestly repeat, to put faith in this speculation concerning occultism is that mental and moral degeneracy,—credulity and fraud,—seem almost invariably so to entangle themselves with occult phenomena that many cool-headed persons are disposed to assert the whole thing a lie. To me it does not seem so simple. I incline more and more to think that necromancers, witches, mediums—call them what you will—actually do perceive in the infinite realities about us things imperceptible to normal human beings; but that they perceive them only at a sacrifice of their higher faculties—mental and moral—not inaptly symbolized in the old tales of those who sell their souls.

If this be true, such an epidemic of witchcraft as came to New England in 1692 is as diabolical a fact as human beings can know: unchecked, it can really work mischief unspeakable. For unchecked it would mean that more and more human beings would give themselves up to deliberate, or perhaps instinctive, effort to retrace the steps by which human intelligence, in countless centuries, has slowly risen from the primitive consciousness of the brute creation.

To my mind, then, the fatally tragic phase of the witch trials is not that there was no evil to condemn, but that the unhappy victims of the trials were condemned literally on clairvoyant evidence. And what I have already said shows that in all probability those really guilty of the nameless crime I have tried to indicate were, in my opinion, not so often the witches as the bewitched.

But let us look at the matter a little more closely again. These wretched bewitched girls were in all probability victims of hypnotic excess. In all probability they had learned, willingly or unwillingly, to hypnotize themselves. But is there not a likelihood that first of all they may have been hypnotized by others? And is there not, in the records of those terrible days, some faint suggestion that among those who first dragged the wretched girls down may have been some of the accused? The actual charges are sometimes manifestly false, almost always utterly incredible,—lying, contradictory, vaporous,—but beneath them all there remains a something which would make me guess that not all of the accused believed themselves innocent.

Put yourself for a moment in the place of those petty New England Calvinists, born and bred under an iron creed that forbade all hope of salvation to any but the elect of a capricious God. Fancy yourself toiling for years in vain to make your human will agree with His, to find in yourself the divine marks of grace. Then, in a moment of despair, fancy yourself toying with occult experiment—not as a scientific observer of the nineteenth century, but as a creed-ridden zealot of the seventeenth, bound to believe that mysterious phenomena are the direct handiwork of either God or Satan. Fancy yourself finding that you could exercise over other and weaker wills than yours that power which, under the name of hypnotism, scientific folks are studying to-day, and not a few of them denouncing as terribly dangerous. Fancy yourself finding that the more you exercised this power the more your victims yielded to it. Remember the debasement and the fraud that come as a hardly resistible temptation to dabblers in occultism to-day. And then ask yourselves if any one, who yielded himself up in old Salem to

such temptations as these, could have doubted that, in the devil's mysterious way, he was doing the devil's chosen work.

I cannot assert a single one of the dead witches to have been such a figure as I have asked you to fancy. But I can assert that if any of them were by chance such a figure,—and it seems to me that careful study might go far to show that more than one of them may have been,—then the dreadful fate that came to him, though it came through evidence hopelessly weak and false, was his moral due.

I have said enough to suggest to you the view of Salem Witchcraft that has forced itself on me. From personal observation I have seen enough of modern occultism, of the lower kind, to believe it unholy. From the evidence of the witch-trials I have gathered hints enough to make me believe that beneath its horrible vaporous confusion lurks just such unholiness as I have seen in the flesh. And no one who knows a bit of the inner history of New England Puritanism can doubt that if this be true, then there were in old Salem men and women who had deliberately sinned against God. I have told all this in a manner that may well have seemed too personal, too assertive of myself. I have chosen to tell it thus deliberately. No one can be better aware than I that to be proved, such views as I have suggested need the full authority that should come from years of scientific and of historical research. No one can know better than I how far I am from such learning as should give my words authority. But sometimes, I think, a frank statement of how an old matter looks to a fresh eye that glances at it never so superficially, may suggest to eyes familiar with it, views that their very familiarity would have prevented them from seeing for themselves. Such a service as this is among the best that men of let-

ters can do for men of learning. And it is only as one who has tried to make himself a man of letters that I have earned the privilege of telling here not what is known of old Salem, but what seems to me perhaps knowable.

NOTE: It is interesting to reflect that if the views presented in this paper are valid, the witch trials, far from being abortive, may have accomplished a result of lasting importance in the history of New England. There was no more playing with occultism here, I think, until modern spiritualism arose, to be followed by the excessive interest in occult matters so notable within the last ten years. Is it not possible that the witch trials, surrounding the whole subject with horror, may actually have checked for more than a century the growth of a tendency which unchecked might gravely have demoralized our national character?